

DIPLOMATS ON THE FRONT LINE

Brian Michael Jenkins

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PREFACE

This paper was presented at the Conference on International Terrorism: The Protection of Diplomatic Premises and Personnel. The conference was held in Bellagio, Italy, March 8-12, 1982. It was organized by the James F. Byrnes International Center of the University of South Carolina.

DIPLOMATS ON THE FRONT LINE

Brian Michael Jenkins

The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California

March 1982

International terrorism is the name we give to a low-level, worldwide war waged by many groups against many nations on behalf of many causes. It is a war in which diplomats are on the front line. More than 25 percent of all international terrorist incidents are directed against diplomats, embassies, and consulates.

THE CHRONOLOGY

The U.S. government recently issued a statistical overview of terrorist attacks against diplomats.* In preparation for this conference, and as part of our continuing research on terrorism, The Rand Corporation prepared its own overview.

There are important differences in criteria and size between the U.S. government and Rand chronologies of terrorist incidents, the sources from which the statistics are drawn. The government's data base is larger. It contains information on 2,688 terrorist attacks against diplomats since 1968, whereas Rand's chronology lists 574 incidents during the same period. Part of the difference lies in criteria. The government chronology includes 645 threats--24 percent of the total number of incidents. The Rand chronology includes only a few threats. Also, conspiracies, hoaxes, and incidents of arms smuggling, which together account for 140 incidents in the government chronology or 5.2 percent of the total, do not appear in the Rand chronology.

Evidence of premeditation is a criterion for inclusion in the Rand chronology. We try to exclude spontaneous acts of violence, such as mobs throwing Molotov cocktails. Because the government's data base is

*U.S. Department of State, *Terrorist Attacks Against Diplomats: A statistical overview of international terrorist attacks on diplomatic personnel and facilities from January 1968 to June 1981*, Washington, DC, December 1981.

highly formatted for computer analysis, each incident is listed separately. In the Rand chronology, which also is computerized, incidents are sometimes combined. For example, a series of letter bombs mailed on the same day may be listed as one incident. As a result, letter bombings, incendiary bombings, and explosive bombings, which together comprise 1,203 incidents in the government data base, or nearly 45 percent of the total, vastly outnumber those listed in the Rand chronology.

Beyond these identifiable differences, the government's larger data base reflects a larger collection effort based on both government and public sources. Despite the differences, the two chronologies provide essentially the same picture of overall trends. We took our analysis a couple of steps further than the government did in its overview. Where not specifically noted otherwise, this review is based on the Rand chronology.

ATTACKS ON DIPLOMATIC TARGETS

The number of terrorist attacks against diplomats has been increasing since 1968 and has dramatically increased in the last two years; 1980 and 1981 together represent a 60 percent increase over the total of the previous two years. 1980 was a high point.

Terrorists not only attacked more often, they also struck the diplomats of more nations. In 1968 and 1969, diplomats and diplomatic facilities of an average of six nations were the targets of terrorist attacks in each year. Between 1970 and 1975, the diplomats of an average of 13 nations were targets. During the second half of the 1970s, an average of 21 nations were struck each year. In 1980 and 1981, diplomats from an average of 35 nations were attacked each year.

Terrorist attacks against the diplomatic community also spread geographically. Terrorist attacks on diplomats occurred in 15 countries in 1968-1969; in 1980-1981, such attacks occurred in 35 countries.

Increased terrorist attacks directed against the diplomatic community are strongly connected with wars between nations and with civil wars within nations. Iranian and Iraqi diplomats have increasingly been the target of terrorist attacks since the outbreak of war between the two countries. Growing conflict in Central America has

resulted in an increasing number of attacks on diplomats from Central American countries, as well as on diplomats of other nations assigned to the region. There is no longer any such thing as a local war. There are no bystanders. There is no diplomatic immunity. Terrorists have defined diplomats as "legitimate" targets.

TACTICS

Bombing is the most common terrorist tactic in general, and bombings are the most common form of attack on the diplomatic community, comprising nearly half of the total number of incidents.

Assassination is the fastest growing form of terrorist attack on diplomats. The number of assassinations and attempted assassinations tripled in 1980 and 1981 as compared to the late 1970s. The largest number of attacks in the last two years were directed against Turkish diplomats by Armenian terrorists.

Kidnappings of diplomats have not increased in recent years. This tactic reached its high point in 1970. Most of the diplomatic kidnappings have occurred in Latin America, where American diplomats have been the favorite targets.

Seizing embassies became a common form of protest and coercion in the 1970s. Since 1971, terrorists and other militants have seized embassies and consulates on more than 50 occasions, generally to demand the release of prisoners or other political concessions, sometimes just to register disapproval of a particular policy. More than half of the embassy takeovers have occurred in the last three years, the dramatic increase being due almost entirely to the political turmoil in Iran and El Salvador.

Except for the publicity it produces, seizing embassies appears generally to be a losing proposition for terrorists. According to an earlier Rand study,* terrorist demands were fully met in less than 17 percent of the embassy seizures. Terrorists were arrested, captured, or killed in 48 percent of the cases where they made demands. One-

* Brian M. Jenkins, *Embassies Under Siege: A Review of 48 Embassy Takeovers, 1971-1980*, The Rand Corporation, R-2651-RC, January 1981.

third of the terrorists who participated in embassy seizures were killed or captured, although the remainder escaped punishment.

It would be reassuring if increased government resistance to meeting terrorist demands and increased security would make the tactic of seizing embassies unattractive to terrorists. Indeed, our chronology does show a decline in embassy takeovers in 1981. But although embassies in some countries have become virtual fortresses, the decline may be primarily due to reasons that have nothing to do with the terrorists' capability to calculate risks. For example, El Salvador's gunmen, who were responsible for eight of the embassy takeovers, moved into the hills to launch a more traditional guerrilla campaign against the government.

TARGETS

Terrorist attacks have been directed against the diplomats or diplomatic premises of 66 nations. However, 10 nations were the targets in more than a half of the incidents.

American diplomats and diplomatic premises accounted for 29 percent of all attacks against the diplomatic community. The prominence of the United States in the list of targets may be due, in part, to a bias inherent in the reporting. Naturally, we know more about what happens to American diplomats than we do about the diplomats of other countries, especially in cases of comparatively minor acts of violence. The large size of the American diplomatic contingent, including consular officers and U.S. International Communications Agency personnel, may be another reason.* The American presence is often conspicuous, with American diplomats being ubiquitous. The prominent role of the United States in the international realm provides another possible reason for the frequency of terrorist attacks on U.S. diplomats.

Many terrorists apparently see the United States with some ambiguity. On the one hand, they see the United States as the source of the

* Later in the conference, an American official contradicted this hypothesis, stating that a U.S. Department of State analysis concluded that the mere size of the American diplomatic community was not in itself a sufficient reason for terrorist emphasis on the United States.

world's troubles. On the other hand, and at the same time, the same terrorists see the United States as able to solve most of the problems if only it could be made to try. Kidnapping and killing U.S. diplomats and bombing U.S. embassies are their peculiar means of punishing our sins and attempting to mobilize our sentiments.

Terrorists, at the very least, often overestimate the leverage they will gain by taking American diplomats hostage. They believe that with an American diplomat in their hands, they can make the local government, upon whom they most frequently levy their demands, capitulate. The historical record does not support this perception.

Turkish diplomats are the second most popular target of terrorist attacks. Eighteen Turkish diplomats (or members of their families) have been killed by terrorists since 1975. While America's attackers represent diverse terrorist groups, Turkey's foes are exclusively members of Armenian groups seeking revenge for the 1915 massacre of Armenians in Turkey, an admission by Turkey of its guilt in the massacre, reparations for the survivors, and the creation of an independent Armenian homeland. Yugoslav diplomats, the target of attacks by Croatian terrorists, rank third, followed by France, Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom.

The order may slightly surprise those who see terrorism as being directed almost exclusively against Western nations: Three communist countries are near the top of the list. Right-wing anti-Castro Cuban émigrés are responsible for the attacks on Cuban diplomats. And the same Cuban terrorist groups, plus anti-Jewish extremists, various right-wing terrorists, and some Moslem extremist groups frequently have attacked Soviet diplomats. British diplomats have been plagued primarily by Irish terrorists operating abroad.

THE TERRORISTS

What can we say about the perpetrators of these attacks? Although terrorism is generally seen as a means used by extremists to gain publicity, nearly half of the attacks have been anonymous. In these cases, the terrorists have relied entirely on their selection of targets to make their point. In those attacks for which credit is

claimed, a wide range of groups--over 100--have been responsible. Among the most prominent are the two Armenian groups, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG). The Armenian terrorists are also the most wide-ranging in their activities. In the past two years, they have carried out 66 attacks in 15 countries on four continents. Next in prominence are the right-wing anti-Castro Cuban groups: El Poder Cubano, FLNC, CORU, and Omega 7. Third place goes to a collection of Palestinian terrorist organizations. Croatian separatists occupy fourth place, followed by the Jewish Defense League and other Jewish extremist groups, leftist groups in El Salvador and Turkey, and a variety of Latin American terrorist groups.

LOCATION

Most of the attacks have taken place in the West. Forty-two percent occurred in Western Europe and North America; 29 percent of the attacks on the diplomatic community took place in Western Europe. Latin America is the second most violent region with regard to terrorist attacks on diplomats, and the Middle East is third. Only a handful of attacks occurred in Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Pacific countries. This corresponds to the general pattern of international terrorism.

The United States was the site of more attacks than any other country. Again, there is some bias in the reporting; we know more about what happens in the United States. Many attacks against diplomats also occurred in the United States because of the presence of the United Nations, which offers a veritable *smorgasbord* of targets for protesters of every stripe. Half of the terrorist attacks on diplomats took place in New York and involved diplomatic missions to the UN. Indeed, protecting missions to the UN is a major security problem for the United States. Only 20 percent of the attacks took place in Washington. The rest involved consulates in Chicago, Miami, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, reflecting the distribution of various ethnic communities.

The remaining favorite locations of terrorist attacks on diplomats, in order, were: France, Lebanon, El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, Turkey, Colombia, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany. Together,

the top ten nations were the scenes of nearly half of the terrorist attacks on diplomats. We see two kinds of countries on this list: first, Western democracies with free societies, tolerance for diverse political movements, and large foreign communities comprised of refugees, exiles, students, and guest workers; second, Third World countries which have experienced or are experiencing active guerrilla struggles.

Many of the attacks on the diplomatic community have been symbolic violence--little bombs set to go off at midnight. Fewer than 20 percent resulted in fatalities. If we look at the locations of only those incidents involving fatalities, we get a slightly different picture. Diplomats have the most hazardous job in Lebanon, then in El Salvador.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROTECTION

What are the implications of all this for the protection of diplomats? Generally, two types of measures seem needed for dealing with the problem: (1) increased security at embassies, and (2) increased international cooperation to reduce the number of attacks.

Security is burdensome and expensive. At the height of the kidnapping problem in Guatemala in the early 1970s, the Guatemalan government reportedly assigned 15 bodyguards to each ambassador. That tied up more than a battalion of soldiers in the capital city--better than 10 percent of the country's armed forces.

An armored limousine and a six-man guard detail costs anywhere from \$200,000 to \$500,000 a year. To protect five to seven principal officers at each embassy--the ambassador, deputy chief of mission, political attache, etc.--would cost from \$1 million to \$2.5 million. On that basis, protection for all of one country's embassies just in the 16 Western European countries where assassinations and kidnappings have occurred would amount to between \$20 million and \$60 million dollars.*

* A. U.S. official at the conference provided further examples of the high cost of security. He stated that 10 to 14 percent of the budget of the Department of State is used for security purposes--a total of \$100 million to \$140 million annually. He further stated

There is, of course, no such thing as absolute security. Terrorists have successfully attacked officials who had bodyguards. They have also used powerful bombs and antitank weapons against which bodyguards and armored cars provide no protection. Moreover, heavy security at the top may merely displace the risk downward. Terrorists have attacked second- and third-echelon officials, assassinating consuls, vice consuls, labor attaches, press secretaries, and recently an assistant military attache. This is not to suggest that high security has no value. Many terrorist attacks are foiled by embassy security, bodyguards, and armored cars.

To get an idea of how improved international cooperation could help solve the problem, we shall consider five types of terrorist activity that are directed against the diplomatic community and possible international remedies for each of them.

1. Terrorist attacks on diplomats that are associated with guerrilla warfare, insurgency, or ongoing terrorist activity. Local terrorists attack diplomats to win international attention, increase their leverage in hostage situations, or punish foreign governments for their perceived involvement in the local conflict. Examples include the attacks on the diplomatic community carried out by urban guerrillas in Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, El Salvador, Spain, and Turkey. This is one of the largest categories of activity. Extradition is not an issue here. Since the local government is usually the real target of the terrorist activity, it is quite willing to meet its international obligations by prosecuting the perpetrators. The local government, however, cannot always apprehend the terrorists. In some cases, the local government may not be able to control the situation. Thus we may have a government that is willing but not always able to comply with its international obligations. Additional international agreements would appear to serve little purpose here.

that other governments were estimated to be devoting 3,000 man-years to protecting American diplomats abroad at a total cost of \$200 million annually. The U.S. government expected to spend a total of \$200 million over the next ten years to improve the security of American embassies abroad.

2. Attacks by ethnic, émigré, or exile groups against the diplomatic representatives of a nation or regime they oppose. For the most part, such groups have little connection with any active struggle within the country they oppose. Examples would include attacks on Turkish diplomats by Armenian terrorists, attacks on Yugoslav diplomats by Croatian terrorists, and attacks on Cuban diplomats by right-wing anti-Castro Cuban émigrés. This is also a large category of activity. Attacks by such groups occur primarily in Western Europe and the United States. The local governments are generally willing to prosecute the attackers as ordinary criminals, even though holding such prisoners exposes the government to further attack. The governments usually have effective police forces. Apprehension is often more difficult in free societies, and the careful judicial processes designed to insure due process may sometimes seem to representatives of other societies to be deliberate foot-dragging. But for the most part, the governments of the countries in which the attacks take place are willing and able to meet their international obligations. Additional international agreements would appear to contribute little in this category.

3. Worldwide attacks on foreign diplomats by terrorists operating abroad as part of a larger campaign against a government. Such attacks would include Palestinian attacks against Israeli and other diplomats and attacks against British diplomats by IRA terrorists. These attacks take place anywhere in the world, but they have occurred primarily in Western Europe. In some cases, the local government--that is, the government of the country in which an attack has occurred--have not been eager to apprehend, prosecute, and hold the terrorists. There are many reasons: Threat of further terrorist attacks directed against the local government discourages vigorous prosecution and imprisonment; perhaps more important, there are considerations of economy and foreign policy which may outweigh the local government's desire to meet its international obligations with regard to protecting diplomats. To put it bluntly, politics may dictate action or inaction. Additional international agreements might address this problem, although success is likely to be limited.

4. Isolated terrorist attacks against diplomats by indigenous groups to protest the actions of a foreign government. This category differs from the first category in that the actions are seldom part of a continuing guerrilla or terrorist campaign. The perpetrators may not even be opponents of the local government. Examples of this type of attack include the bombing of the French embassy in Peru to protest planned French nuclear tests in the Pacific; the bombing of the American consulate in Nice in retaliation for American protests against the Concorde landing in the United States; the bombing of the South African consulate in San Francisco to protest that country's *apartheid* policies. Such attacks occur mainly in Western Europe and the United States. The local government's response to such cases is likely to be the same as in Category 2 incidents--it is generally willing to prosecute and punish the perpetrators, thereby meeting its international obligations. Since such actions are often bombings, and bombings are very difficult crimes to solve, the apprehension rate is likely to be low. Additional international agreements would contribute little.

5. Government use of terrorist tactics or employment of terrorist groups to attack foreign diplomats abroad as a continuation of a local armed conflict or as a mode of surrogate warfare against a foreign foe. To be sure, a lot of terrorist activity is aided and abetted by governments. Much of the Palestinian activity directed against Israeli targets around the world has been directly supported by certain Arab governments, and some of the terrorists who attack American targets in Latin America have benefitted from training in Cuba. Much of terrorism is indeed surrogate warfare. But in this category, we are talking about something more direct. Examples would include Iran's exploitation of the seizure of the American embassy in Teheran, the assassination of Iranian and Iraqi diplomats as an extension of the war between Iran and Iraq, and Libya's dispatch of "hit teams" to assassinate American diplomats in Europe. Such obvious cases are few, but this appears to be a growing category of activity. It is an area where additional international agreements with the possibility of collective sanctions against the responsible nations appear necessary.

In sum, for most categories of terrorist attacks on diplomats--including the largest categories--local governments are willing to meet their obligations with regard to protecting diplomats and prosecuting those who attack them. The ability of those governments to provide protection and apprehend perpetrators may vary with the local level of conflict. There are only a few obvious cases of national misbehavior of the type mentioned in Category 5, and even in these cases, many of the allegations are hard to prove. Closing in on this part of the problem with further international agreements would be useful, but it represents only a small fraction of the terrorist attacks on the diplomatic community. The big problem is not simply that of persuading governments to meet their international obligations; rather, local guerrillas and protesting émigrés must be convinced that diplomats are not appropriate targets of attack.

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